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(POWERS)

BIG STONE GAP, VA.--PEOPLE WHO ONCE KNEW HIM AS A SHOEMAKER'S SON HONORED U2 PILOT FRANCIS GARY POWERS TODAY AS "NOT ONLY OUR HERO, BUT ON OF OUR BOYS WHO MADE GOOD."

TWO HIGH SCHOOL BANDS, ABOUT 600 PEOPLE AND THE MAYORS OF WISE COUNTY'S SEVEN TOWNS ABOUT HALF-FILLED THE NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY HERE TO HONOR THE SPY PILOT WHO BECAME A NATIONAL FIGURE WHEN HIS AIRPLANE WENT DOWN OVER RUSSIA MAY 1, 1960.

REP. W. JENNINGS, D-VA., CALLED HIM A MAN WHO "SERVED HIS COUNTRY IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM." EACH OF THE SEVEN MAYORS MADE A BRIEF SPEECH PRAISING HIM AND STATE SEN. M. M. LONG CALLED HIM "ONE OF OUR BOYS WHO MADE GOOD."

POWERS ENTERED THE ARMORY WITH HIS MOTHER, IDA, AND HIS FATHER, OLIVER, WHILE THE HIGH SCHOOL BANDS PLAYED "WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME."

THROUGHOUT THE CEREMONIES HE SAT QUIETLY BENEATH A SIGN PROCLAIMING:

"WISE COUNTY WELCOMES YOU HOME GARY" AND HELD HIS MOTHER'S HAND.

NEAR THE END OF THE CEREMONIES' THE LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS PRESENTED HIM WITH A CITIZENSHIP AWARD. POWERS THEN MADE BRIEF REMARKS WHICH LASTED ABOUT ONE MINUTE.

HE SAID HE WAS THANKFUL FOR THE CONFIDENCE THE PEOPLE OF HIS HOME COMMUNITY HAD IN HIM. HE SAID HE WAS GRATIFIED THAT THE WELCOME HOME HAD BEEN PLANNED BEFORE FEDERAL AUTHORITIES ANNOUNCED HE SATISFACTORILY FULFILLED HIS MISSION AS A SPY PILOT.

"I THANK YOU FOR IT," HE SAID.

AT THIS POINT, HIS FATHER PULLED OUT A HANDKERCHIEF AND WIPPED HIS EYES.

AFTER THE CEREMONIES POWERS TOLD NEWSMEN HE EXPECTED THE SOVIET COURTS TO SENTENCE HIM TO DEATH FOR ESPIONAGE.

"I EXPECTED TO BE SHOT UNTIL THE DAY I HEARD THE VERDICT," HE SAID. BUT HE ADDED THAT HIS TREATMENT IN THE SOVIET PRISON WAS "MUCH BETTER THAN I EXPECTED."

3/12--N 700 PES